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PART 1

An Introduction to Criminal Justice Inquiry

What comes to mind when you encounter the word *science*? What do you think of when we describe criminal justice as a social science? For some people, science is mathematics; for others, it is white coats and laboratories. Some confuse it with technology or equate it with difficult courses in high school or college.

Science is, of course, none of these things per se, but it is difficult to specify exactly what science is. Scientists, in fact, disagree on the proper definition. Some object to the whole idea of social science; others question more specifically whether criminal justice can be a social science.

For the purposes of this book, we view science as a method of inquiry—a way of learning and knowing things about the world around us. Like other ways of learning and knowing about the world, science has some special characteristics. We'll examine these traits in this opening set of chapters. We'll also see how the scientific method of inquiry can be applied to the study of crime and criminal justice.

Part One lays the groundwork for the rest of the book by examining the fundamental characteristics and issues that make science different from other ways of knowing things. Chapter 1 begins with a look at native human inquiry, the sort of thing all of us have been doing all our lives. We'll also consider research purposes and the basics of how to design a research project.

Chapter 2 deals with the ethics of social science research. The study of crime and criminal justice often presents special challenges with regard to ethics. We'll see that most ethical questions are rooted in two fundamental principles: (1) research subjects should not be harmed, and (2) their participation must be voluntary.

The overall purpose of Part One, therefore, is to construct a backdrop against which to view more specific aspects of research design and execution. By the time you complete the chapters in Part One, you will be ready to look at some of the more concrete aspects of criminal justice research.

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